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Agenda item 2

Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

Letter dated 4 February 2005 from the Permanent Representative of South Africa to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Economic and Social Council

I am pleased to transmit to you herewith the statement that I delivered on behalf of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi to the Economic and Social Council on 4 February 2005 (see annex). The oral report to the Council was submitted pursuant to Council resolution 2004/60 of 23 July 2004. I would be grateful if the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Council.

(Signed) Dumisani S. Kumalo

Ambassador

Permanent Representative of the Republic of South Africa



Annex

Oral report delivered by the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi to the Economic and Social Council on 4 February 2005

The Council will recall that the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi reported orally to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session for 2004 (see E/2004/98). In its resolution 2004/60 of 23 July 2004, the Council requested the Group to continue to follow closely the humanitarian situation and economic and social conditions, to examine the transition from relief to development in Burundi and the way in which the international community supports the process and to report, as appropriate, to the Council at its organizational session in 2005.

The Council carried out an assessment of its ad hoc advisory groups on African countries emerging from conflict, which culminated in the adoption of Council resolution 2004/59 of 23 July 2004. In that resolution, the Council commended the advisory groups for their innovative and constructive work in support to Guinea-Bissau and Burundi. In particular, the Council commended the advisory groups for: the promotion of a comprehensive approach to peace and development and an integrated vision of relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and development; their close collaboration with the organizations of the United Nations system, including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund; and their advocacy role for international support to the countries concerned. The Council also made recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of their work, including a further increase in the interaction between the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council.

Since the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council last summer, the Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Burundi has pursued its work, inspired and motivated by the positive assessment made by the Council, while duly taking into account the proposals made to improve its efficiency.

In September 2004, the Group met with Domitien Ndayizeye, President of Burundi, when he attended the opening of the fifty-ninth session of the General Assembly. The President provided an update on the status of the peace process, including the reform of security forces, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and the need for international support to ensure the success of the transition process. He further requested the continued support of the Ad Hoc Advisory Group in mobilizing such support. That meeting, which was also attended by Carolyn McAskie, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Burundi and Head of the United Nations Operation in Burundi (ONUB), was an opportunity for the Group to plan its activities for the following months.

In my previous presentations to the Council, I expressed satisfaction regarding the Forum of Development Partners, organized by the Governments of Burundi and Belgium, together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), held in Brussels in January 2004, and the establishment of ONUB, an integrated peacekeeping operation that is now fully deployed and active on the ground. Other important developments have taken place over the last months with regard to international support to Burundi, in line with the recommendations contained in the initial report of the Group to the Council:

- In the field of debt relief, on 27 October 2004, the African Development Bank decided to clear 35 per cent of Burundi's arrears, in an amount equivalent to \$12 million United States dollars. This measure allows the Bank to resume its operations in Burundi after five years of almost interrupted activities and facilitates access by Burundi to other multilateral facilities. Contributions of the European Commission and France for debt relief to Burundi have made it possible to finalize the payment of these arrears. Belgium, Italy, Norway and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have also contributed to the Multilateral Debt Trust Fund managed by the World Bank, and Italy and the Russian Federation have entered into a bilateral debt alleviation and cancellation agreement with Burundi;
- The launching of the demobilization, reinsertion and reintegration programme in December 2004 to support up to 55,000 Burundian combatants in the coming five years is also a major development. This programme is financed through a grant under the multi-donor demobilization and reintegration programme, managed by the World Bank, and by the World Bank itself. UNDP supports the reinsertion component of the programme. The multi-donor demobilization and reintegration programme trust fund is also financing a project for child soldiers in Burundi, implemented by the Burundian authorities with technical assistance from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Along with the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme, international support, mostly through ONUB and UNDP, is provided to the electoral process;
- The United Nations system has continued to provide on the ground assistance in various fields, so as to engage in a transition from emergency relief to development. UNDP has launched additional projects for the reinsertion and rehabilitation of communities through its framework programme of support to communities, a mechanism that has proved successful in attracting donor contributions and channelling them to communities in need. In late July 2004, the World Bank decided to grant \$40 million to Burundi for agricultural rehabilitation and land management project. On 11 November 2004, the Secretary-General launched the 2005 Consolidated Appeal for Humanitarian Assistance through which \$134 million was requested for Burundi, almost half of which is dedicated to supporting the return of refugees.

These developments should not hide the fact that humanitarian, economic and social needs are enormous in Burundi. The country is emerging from 10 years of war, which has caused the displacement of a fifth of the population and has gravely damaged physical and economic infrastructures. In 2004 alone, some 90,000 refugees from the United Republic of Tanzania and 140,000 internally displaced persons returned to their communities of origin, putting strong additional pressure on fragile community resources as well as the national authorities. Since the economy of the country largely depends on the production of coffee, its capacity to stimulate growth is limited.

In this challenging environment, administrative infrastructures have continued to function. Representatives of the Bretton Woods institutions have repeatedly stressed the effectiveness of the control of public spending in Burundi. There has been progress in the peace process since the Advisory Group visited Burundi in late 2003. A referendum on the constitution, now scheduled for 28 February 2005, will

be followed by a series of elections, from local to legislative and presidential. Recently, the spokesman of the President of Burundi said that there have been contacts with the Party for the Liberation of the Hutu People-National Liberation Forces (PALIPEHUTU-FNL) (of Agathon Rwasa), the only rebel group that has remained outside the peace process.

In spite of such progress, the level of international support is far below that of the commitments made at the Forum of Development Partners held in Brussels one year ago, which amounted to \$1.032 billion. It has been the tendency of some donors to wait and see how the political process will evolve, while improvements in the economic and social living conditions of the population might make all the difference and sustain the road to a definitive settlement of disputes. For example, at the Brussels Forum, the Government of Burundi presented a national programme for the rehabilitation of war victims (*sinistrés*) for a total amount of close to €500 million euros, including social reinsertion and agricultural rehabilitation. Although support was expressed for the programme at that time, it remains of dire need of resources. In this context, the Group believes that the Economic and Social Council should encourage participants in the Brussels Forum to increase their disbursements, following the positive steps taken by some of them over the last months.

An example of the current fragility of the economic and social situation in Burundi is the recent food insecurity in the northern provinces of the country, which caused new displacements of populations and led to an appeal by the authorities of Burundi for international emergency support. According to United Nations agencies on the ground, this situation is the result of a combination of factors, including drought, infestation, land pressure and reduced amounts of arable land for households, reduced land productivity and malnutrition, resulting from cycles of common and chronic diseases, including malaria and HIV/AIDS. Beyond emergency relief, this situation reveals a number of structural problems that the international community should help to address through broader support and increased capacity-building.

In its resolution 2004/59 on the assessment of the ad hoc advisory groups, the Council urged the advisory groups to expand their relationships with the United Nations Development Group/Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs working group on transition issues by exploring the complementary nature of their work. Following the Council's request, the Group held a meeting with representatives of the working group in December. At the meeting, participants discussed the mechanisms put in place by the United Nations system in Burundi to improve the coordination of activities in the transition phase, in particular the United Nations Development Assistance Framework, which lays out an agreed set of priorities and a common strategy to meet those priorities for the period from 2005 to 2007. The implementation of the Assistance Framework just started in January. It was further explained to the Group that the articulation of the work being done by ONUB and the United Nations agencies was a major challenge. Mechanisms to integrate the work of the peacekeeping mission in the implementation and monitoring structure of the Assistance Framework are considered and steadily put in place.

At the meeting with the working group on transition issues, the Group was briefed by Ms. Margareta Wahlstrom, Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, returning from Burundi. Ms. Wahlstrom stressed the challenge of the return of

Burundians to their communities of origin and stated that, in this context, the issue of equity in assistance was essential. She also concurred with the Group that all international partners had to contribute to strengthening Government administration and Burundian civil society in order to ensure a sustainable stabilization process, and stressed that health, education and other social sectors needed urgent donor support to ensure reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons and to consolidate peace.

As stated in its initial report to the Economic and Social Council one year ago, the Advisory Group considers that Burundi is at a crossroads and that the efforts made by the Government and the people must be matched by strong international support, in the framework of a true partnership. This position remains valid, and the Group feels that the people of Burundi should be given real opportunities and that a comprehensive approach to peace and development in favour of this country should prevail. In this context, the Group is of the view that it should continue its activities during the transition process in Burundi, including a second mission to the country, honouring the invitation made by President Ndayizeye in September.

